



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Marjorie Tomlinson of the 2/6th Hospital Tape 1, Side 1.

Marjorie, could we perhaps just begin by, where you began? When you were born and so on.

Well, I was born on 3rd January 1914 at Forbes in central western New South Wales and I lived there all my life, till I went to boarding school. I was at the local high school, went through the school to the beginning of high school and then I went to Sydney to boarding school, to PLC Pymble where I remained till I left school. And I was at home with my parents, helping them at home for three years before I started my training at Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney in May of about 19....

I think we worked out, 1930, 31.

1931, yes. Something like that.

And I think you were saying you were trained there for about four years and then went on there for eighteen months or so afterwards.

Yes, I was there for about, including my training, four years, for about five and a half years till I was called up in the army.

Could I perhaps ask you why you wanted to be a nurse, and did it fulfil your expectations?

Yes, it certainly did and I don't regret having done it. I had a great friend who had been at the hospital for two years and she used to write very interesting letters about her training. And I also had a great friend of my mother's who was older than me but was wife of our local doctor in Forbes and she trained at Sydney Hospital. And she used to talk to me about it and rather encourage me to do it. I think it was finally through Mrs McLaine that I decided to go and do my training.

That's interesting, Marjorie. An interesting thing, I think, is that you enlisted in fact before the war began, before war was declared which was quite unusual. I gather you had some or fairly strong feelings about developments in Europe.

Yes, well, the world situation was looking rather as though war was going to eventually come. We hoped it wouldn't but somehow or other, I thought, oh, I'll go out to the Victoria Barracks and try and enlist before, must have been June or July, could have been a little bit later, and before war was declared in September.

What was their reaction when you turned up?

Oh, they just put me down on the waiting list. I understand a few people had done it but I don't know whether they were nurses or just men, medical men or just lay people that enlisted before war was declared. Whether they felt it was coming, and ....

How did your family play a part in this? Were they supportive of that decision, or not?

Oh yes, they were quite supportive of it. And my father was very, not enthusiastic for me to go to war, but I think he was enthusiastic about the fact that I was, well, wanted to do that sort of thing, and perhaps see a country or whatever.

Had he been in the first war?

No, but he had a brother who was in the first world war. And I suppose having been on the land he would have been, like it was in the second world war, more or less conscripted so to speak, to rural, or essential services as they were called.

(5.00) Sure. The ANZAC tradition of what Australian men and women did do in the first war, was that very much part of your childhood or your youth memories, or not?

The first thing I can remember of the first world war was my uncle, Wally, coming and a nephew of my father's who was almost like a brother, really, coming home from the first world war and all the family and a lot of friends in the district had an enormous picnic on the side of Tallabung mountain which is just about an outcrop in those areas, as it's so flat everywhere. And that's the first thing I was, I suppose, five - four or five, and that's about the first thing I can remember about the first world war.

That's interesting. Well, going on to the second war, Marjorie. You'd enlisted before the war. Do you have any actual clear memory of the declaration of war? And if you do, how did it affect you? How did you feel?

Um. Yes, I was going back to Prince Alfred and I think, if I remember it was a Sunday evening that war was declared, and I was going back and we just had got over the Harbour Bridge into the city and we.... The paper boys were running around with huge papers, screaming out 'War, war, war', and that is my vivid remembrance and it rather sent cold chivers down one's spine, actually, to think although it was imminent, to think it had actually happened was rather hard to believe, in our lifetime.

Yes, sure, and after all the horrors of the first world war.

Before you tape anything, you were talking about the spirit of ANZAC, did you just mention that?

Yes.

No, don't tape this on for a second ....

Well, moving on a little bit, Marjorie, I think it was September 1940, we'd worked out that you were in fact called up and you went first to Ingleburn, later to Bathurst. What was your first recollection of service life, of the general routines and so on, of being in the army?

I feel that you were there to do a job, really, and I was rather, well, surprised, agreeably surprised, with the speed with which certain, well, the hospital facilities and the ... had been gathered together, really, and the administrative side of it all. And how you learnt a lot about, perhaps that the everyday person in the street didn't when you were involved immediately in these things. And there was a certain air of, I suppose, excitement, not so much pleasant excitement about it, but you felt there was a different way of life coming about, for how long you wouldn't know it was going to be.

What was your first impression of the key people in the hospital? I'm thinking of Colonel Money, your matron, perhaps Colonel Money's deputy.

We had a matron up at Bathurst with us, Colonel Money wasn't at Bathurst with us. He was really, he probably came up once or twice to see us, or once to see the camp. We weren't there for terribly long at Bathurst and .... But the matron was there and she was a wonderful person, very fair, very strict, but very humane with it all. And a most respected, you could not help having great respect for her really. And her early demise really, later after the war, was a great shock to most of us because she was by no means an elderly person.

Yes, I have heard about that sad story from Mrs Cameron, I think.

Colonel Money spent a lot of his time where I think the headquarters were at Walgrove at the hospital and being the CO of it, of course, he had a lot to do with Victoria Barracks and the DDMS and the central administration of it. And collecting his staff that he wanted, his medical officers and his orderly people, too. He seemed to have the capacity to select the right people that he wanted. And they were all very good medical men, every one of them.

(10.00) When you arrived there, did you actually have any further training, or was it simply a matter of adapting your civilian training to army routines and so on?

Well, the medical side of it, we didn't have any really more training in them, we were fully trained nurses, and we would have known .... We had training in military ethnics I suppose, or etiquette rather, not ethnics, that should be cut out, etiquette. And for instance we were taken on marches and we had to observe the rules of senior military men and salute them or whatever, and that sort of thing we had to have training in which we knew nothing about.

Of course, at the start of the war you weren't officers, I know later nurses were made, given officer status. Was there any resentment over that? That people felt they should have been, had the rank or status of officers, or not?

I think there might have been a little bit with senior girls that had been through training and perhaps a good deal, I was one of the younger ones in the unit, and quite a bit younger than some of them, and there were several of us of that age group though. And we were made lieutenants and then later on in the war, after I suppose a couple of years some of us were promoted to captains .... that's on that list.

Yes, yes. I do know that. Just one other related issue to this, this is stepping on a little bit. When the VADs came over later on and arrived in the Middle East, was there any resentment that you recall, on the part of nurses towards VADs in that they weren't fully trained, etcetera, or not?

Oh, well, I certainly didn't. I think there was a little bit of it with some people but that was human nature in any way, walk of life. But they were wonderful girls, they were very dedicated to their job, they didn't mind what they did, it was all for service that they were there and they were great help in the wards. There was no doubt about that.

> Yes, I've certainly gathered that myself. Well, moving on a little bit, Marjorie. It was, of course, from Bathurst that the hospital embarked on the *Queen Mary* I understand you were an advance party and you went there some ten days before the main unit?

Yes. I went down about ten days before to more or less set up the hospital and get the beds made up and get any necessary equipment that was sent on, and where it would be handy because really as soon as the troops embarked it was no time before we had some people sick. If it was just flu or whatever, bronchitis some of them had, and seasickness, some of them were quite sick with seasickness.

> Was there anything you could do for that, incidentally, or not?

No. They give them sort of sedative or things that settle them down really, I don't think there's any terrific cure for seasickness. I think it was an unfortunate thing if you have it.

> You grin and bear it. Well, just going back to the hospital on the *Queen Mary*. Could you describe for us what it was like? I mean how spacious or cramped was it? How good or bad were the facilities?

Well, of course it was one of the biggest rooms on the ship that were converted into [inaudible]. No, from memory, it's a while ago of course, but from memory it was quite adequate as a hospital ward, particularly when it's a makeshift in a way, not built specially for hospital.

> Yes, sure. And during the voyage itself, having established the hospital, it was obviously staffed by nurses such as yourself. Did you work there every day on the voyage, or did you have periods when you had no work and you could really relax and enjoy the voyage?

Oh, no, we were put on duty most of the time, really, but just had your ordinary time on duty that you would have if you were in a hospital, so shifts, either morning, afternoon, evening or night duty shifts you were on, just the same as working hours in a hospital back in civilian life. But, most days, I think ... and then, of course, you'd have your day off a week as usual, or half day a week, whatever it is provided that ... we weren't treating wounded people, of course, we were .... Only just the usual sickness occasionally and an operation might have been performed, like an acute appendix, something to that effect.

(15.00) Well, you obviously had a large number of people there, so you, I guess, expect that. What are your other recollections of the voyage, perhaps of general shipboard life or social life on board?

Well, I suppose there was a certain amount of social life. They tried to keep the troops happy, but the officers and the sisters were in a very much more comfortable conditions during the voyage than the troops were, and there were thousands of troops on board. I can't remember

the exact number but I think it would have been well over 10,000 personnel on board the *Queen Mary*. But you felt, you couldn't help feeling sorry for the boys at night because they could come up to the decks on, during the daytime but they had to be all blacked-out and, well, so was the whole of the ship blacked-out, the portholes, and it was very uncomfortable in the tropical areas, but ....

> And I'd imagine the troops were lower down on the ship where it was fairly airless and hot and so on.

That's right, the troops were very down, very ... down in the hold, right down below sea level, of course. And in hammocks, and crowded, very crowded, and you couldn't help feeling very sorry for them. And having to keep fit, they used to have exercises up on the deck, up in the fresh air every day. And then of course, a certain amount, certain ones of them were on duty as far as their units were concerned, and had to see to different things.

> Just as a matter of interest, did you ever yourself go down into the lower decks where they were?

Yes, we did, some of us went down to have a look and see the conditions and sort of talk to them for a while if they were ... and see what they were in. And they were reasonably very happy, there was no sign of discontent or, you might say, rioting or demonstrating amongst them in any way at all. They were all really took it marvellously.

> There must have been quite a strong feeling amongst everybody, yourself, the men, officers of what you were going to do. Was there much anticipation and talk about that, or not?

No. Well, we often wondered where we were going to land. You know, of course it was .... We had an idea that it was to the Middle East somewhere but, of course, we didn't know as everything was so hush hush in that respect - destinations. When writing letters home, well, of course, we couldn't write letters home till we got to Colombo because there was no means of posting them. And you were not allowed to say where you were or name any place but I suppose from the worldwide news that came over to the people back home, they had a pretty good idea where we were and where we were going.

> Yes. That's interesting. Well moving on a little bit, I know you did at Trincomalee, tranship and I think went on a smaller ship that other people have said in a way was more comfortable.

Oh, much. But the *Dilwara*, all these ships, I've forgotten how many ships the *Queen Mary*, transhipped into but quite a lot. And they were built specially for carrying British troops out to India during peacetime. They were proper military transport ships and they were much more comfortable. Well, though, there again, they were blacked-out at night, and portholes seized in case anyone ... closed in case anyone had a light in the cabins and it was visible.

> Sure. Was there much talk and tension about submarine attack during the voyage, or not?

Well, I suppose there was a certain amount but somehow or other, speaking personally, you didn't think of it. There was destroyers and escorts on the convoy and the destroyers did a

zigzag voyage all the way across and really went twice the distance of the other ships in the convoy all the time. And you had a sense of security when you saw them, but of course, they wouldn't stop any submarines if they blew up underneath you.

Yes, sort of the busy destroyer. Moving on a bit, of course there was the journey through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal and later you landed at Haifa. A very, very different world from the world that obviously you all were used to in Australia.

Yes.

Do you remember that? Was there a very real level of what people today might call culture shock? The strangeness of your surroundings and so on.

Well, yes, it was all different. You read about these as you went through school life, the people that lived and their cultures over there. It rather, yes, I suppose it did hit you that, well, this is what we read about and this is unbelievable to see that it is in fact true, really, that it is their way of life over here which is quite different. Climatically it was very similar to, well, central Australia, anyway, or central western New South Wales. It was a very dry, hot heat and very cold in the winter.

(20.00) Yes. I was going to say, being a girl from Forbes you had probably in many ways quite a good background climatically.

Mm, very similar climate to where I was born and lived for a long time, and, but that didn't worry us, worry me, anyway, but it was hot and dry and you never got storms or rain from March till November. You could go anywhere and didn't bother about an umbrella, it didn't rain, it was just dry and hot. And the desert, once it rained in November till March it was wet on and off all the time. The deserts and the dryness just exploded in vegetation and green and poppies and blue flowers. It was quite the land of milk and honey almost that you read about in the Bible, I suppose.

It must have been beautiful when that happened. Of course another aspect I was going to ask you later but perhaps I might now, was in the dry seasons, the dust storms and I think in that letter you showed me you recalled a particularly severe one.

Yes *khamseens* they were called. They were called *khamseens* yes, and they were really blinding and they almost, the sand that they blew up from the desert during the dry times were hot and the sand stung your face. It literally would sting your face if it was exposed to the atmosphere.

Sure. You said they were called *khamseens*, was it?

Khamseens, yes, *khamseens*. I'd have to ....

Right. That's a local word, not 'camp scene'. Right. We can clarify that.

Yes, you'd have to look up the dictionary.

The dust storm that you mentioned in that partiuclar letter, was that one of the worst you'd experienced, or not?

Yes, I think it was, really, the worst, because although we were at Gaza Ridge when the dry hot, long summers it was ... there were dust storms, it wasn't in the desert like it is in North Africa so much, although there were parts of Israel and as you got further inland to Beersheba the dust was and the [inaudible] desert was terrible.

That's most interesting. Well, moving on a little bit, Marjorie. You very, well almost immediately on arrival, the date we had was 31st January '41. You were detached to the 1st AGH, of course the 2/6th wasn't properly set up, doing night duty, I think, initially in a tented hospital. What are your first recollections of that, your first medical nursing work in the Middle East?

Well, I was put in a tent, an isolation ward, which was a tent and it was quite, really coming down, well, to earth, to think you were nursing in a tent where the hygiene and the, was so different from the routine of a big public hospital in Sydney. You really felt, well, this is nursing under completely different conditions. And you had to make the most of it really. But you realised that you'd come, you were going to do something that was quite different from what you were trained in to a certain extent. You had to use a lot of your own initiative with things, but basically the equipment was really, it was there for you to make use ... not the modern equipment in hospital but there was enough there for you to make use of to do what you wanted, what had to be done.

Perhaps could you tell us, as you remember them, the physical details of a tented ward, I mean, for example were the floors earth floors, or had they concreted them in some way? How, were they waterproof completely, or not?

Oh, no, they were dirt floors, most of them. Some of them may have had a concrete slab on them, but basically they were dirt floors. And then later on, there were a few wards that were built as huts, hut type of wards which were, of course, had wooden floors and were much more comfortable. When they got very busy, they were half and half tents. Because we had 2,000 patients when we eventually came back to Gaza, a 2,000 bed hospital.

Yes, I remember your saying that. And how generally weatherproof were the tents in terms of heat, cold, rain, dust and so on?

Oh, well, they were big EPI tents, as they were called and they were really, unless there was torrential rain which you might have got occasionally in the rainy season. No, they were waterproof and quite, quite good in that respect.

Dust-proof?

Well, as dust-proof as tents could be, yes, they were quite good.

(25.00) That's interesting. Well, we may come back, I think to talk about the details and the routines when we've been through the Greece episode, when you were there for longer. It was in March, I think, that you embarked for Greece. Do you remember the preparations for the journey? For instance, what equipment you had to take, what personal things you could take?

Well, we took all our own personal things that we'd taken over to the Middle East with us, and it went all the way to Athens. And, but we had a ... the train journey from Gaza right down through to Cairo and eventually Alexandria. It was very, it was most trying really. It was ... we kept saying, 'Wouldn't it be lovely if we arrived at the most beautiful hotel with every mod cons after this dirty, dusty trip'. And then to our amazement they had taken over hotels in Alexandria where we were billeted for some, for a few days, or, I can't remember it may have been twenty-four or thirty-six hours. And that rather put the icing on the cake for the rest, for it to end like that on the journey, dreadful train journey which was really, anyone that's gone from Gaza to Cairo by train, even I think these days, will tell you it's pretty horrific.

> Yes, well, it's certainly a fairly bleak stretch of country. And when you got to Cairo, did you by that stage know you were destined for Greece, or not?

Oh, we had, we were, there were rumours about it, yes. We had rumours about it, but we weren't sure when it was to be. Anyway it was in a few days time because we were embarked on an old ship called the *Pennland* which was later sunk by the German air force.

> Well, going on to Greece, itself, Marjorie. The journey over, I know, was uneventful. What was your first impression of Greece? There was obviously a lot of organisational chaos, that was the fault of nobody, perhaps inevitable, but it did exist.

Oh, yes.

> How did that affect your arrival and what happened afterwards?

Well, we were put from the ship into trucks to go down to where we were eventually billeted in Athens and, but all the way down from Pireaus where we disembarked, the Greek people were lining the streets and you got ... they were waving and throwing flowers onto the trucks and most welcome, as much as if the poor souls probably felt that, well, they are going to be relieved of the fear that people at the ... the allied forces had come to see to their eventual safety, really. They gave us a great welcome. But then you saw all the ancient things in the distance that you read about in history at school and whatever. There again to see them was, well, made you feel, well, they are real, it is a fact of life, this part of the world, really.

> After you'd settled in and I'd imagine it took some days, the message must finally have come through to you indirectly if not directly that you were probably not going to have any real major role to play. How did the nurses feel? How did you feel?

Well, we were disappointed, really, because we knew that our men had gone up to set up a hospital. We had no idea the German invasion, I don't think, really was so close to us being evacuated back again. And although where we were billeted at a suburb called Kiphissia, in Athens, out of Athens, there was an airport, an aerodrome just on the flat at the bottom of a range of hills. And they used to come over that every day, perhaps twice a day, strafing, bombing it. But not to any great extent, but .... We were very disappointed not being able to go up to where the hospital was to operate. And we realised that after a few days, when we were put on two hours' notice. We had to report to some particular headquarters in Athens

every two hours. And we weren't doing anything really, and we found a little place where we could hire bicycles. And we used to the hire bicycles and go for two hours, an hours' ride in one direction and then turn round and come back and report. And they'd say, 'No, you don't have to come back, report in another two hours'. Well, this went on I suppose, for twenty-four hours or so.

Could I just pause please.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Yes, you were just saying about the bicycles. Um, yes, in fact I think I was going to ask you how widely you managed to get around. Did you see all the old places in Athens and so on?

Oh, yes, we were fortunate in that. We went all over the Parthenon and round the various streets and all the old, historic places and Likavittós and all the very ancient things of, in Athens that were very interesting and great importance in the world civilisation today, really.

Yes, of course. There was one time when Pireaus was being bombed, and a bomb happened to hit an ammunition ship that a lot of people talk about. Do you recollect that? Do you ... the noise or the aftermath of it?

Yes, indeed, I do. It was seven miles away and we were billeted in a hotel in Amonia Square and the noise was terrible, the first thing we'd ever heard of bombs, really. It was close and yet it was seven miles away, and the windows everywhere were rattling. I flew out of bed, I grabbed my uniform and put it on. And Moira Crittenden and I were in the same room; she said, 'Quickly, give me my skirt, you've got it on'. I said, 'No, you put mine on, I'm going'. And I went down to, there was an underground railway station in Amonia Square and I went down and the others, several of them followed, and we spent the night down there with the Greeks who'd run, as a type of air raid shelter. But that was very bad for the 6th AGH because two of our orderlies who were guarding the stores, our equipment for the hospital, down at Pireaus were killed in the bombing attack. And ....

Yes, I have heard that.

And they were buried in, they had a military funeral in Athens and Matron asked some of us to go to it as they didn't have any relatives, of course, over there. And that was my first, um, introduction to a firing squad, more or less, over, a gun salute I suppose, over a grave, which was rather, well, made you realise that things, what was happening.

Yes, of course. Well, another thing that must have done just that to you was the account you were telling me of how, at some point, you were, I think it was Medical Lieutenant Colonel McDonald organised for you, I think only for a matter of half a day or so to look after some severely wounded troops come down from the north. And I think the story began with a syringe.

That's right. I had a hyperdermic syringe which I'd had during my training and I somehow or other had it in my pocket. And I said to Colonel McDonald, 'I have a hyperdermic syringe, is

that any use to you?'. 'Oh', he said, 'Come with me', and there were I suppose, in one of these houses in Kiphissia, Greek and British troops that had been very, very severely wounded. They were brought down, they were just ... there was no equipment, nothing to do anything with except to give them a drink and some, fortunately Colonel McDonald had morhpia to give them some relief from their pain, which had to be given to them because no way would they ever have recovered with treatment or not, they were so severely wounded, some of them.

(5.00) Could I just clarify something. I know there were hospitals in Athens.

Oh, yes.

> Would these be men who'd been sent to the south and not admitted to hospital simply because space was at a premium and obviously they dealt with men they could save rather than men they probably could never save?

That could be so. I don't know. Whether the hospitals in Athens were evacuated and there were no, they were not functioning I am not, I don't know. But that, because as I've mentioned, most of the Greeks, you didn't see many walking about except military personnel, really. And the suburb where we were evacuated, all the homes where we were billeted and then eventually evacuated from there, were all evacuated before, when war was declared on Greece.

> I see. Right. Just going back to these particular men. I think you were saying that they were quite horrendously wounded.

Oh, very much so. One I remember was really, it nearly, you wondered, he had the most dreadful ulcerated mouth, he had both arms blown off - he was an English boy - and both legs blown off. There was just his torsum really left and his head and he could hardly speak. And all you could do was to give him a drink to ... and he was given a, Colonel McDonald said, 'Give that poor man half a grain', or it could have been a grain of morphia, but it wasn't a lethal dose, I suppose, but it must have ... he couldn't have lasted very many more hours with or without.

> Was he conscious?

Yes, he was conscious, if you could call it, to a point, mm.

> How stoical, or otherwise were men in that kind of condition?

Well, wonderful, really. They were wonderful, I used to feel. They just didn't complain, they just seemed to think it was part of what they'd committed themselves, perhaps, to. But I think they were always very stoic.

> And for nurses, this was something I was going to ask you later, but perhaps now is an appropriate moment. When you were dealing with situations like that where they were just quite horrendous wounds and suffering and all the rest of it, how did you cope, yourselves, how did you not become too worn down or too upset by it all?

Well, I think this is part of your medical training, your medical training, really. You see some very, doing your training, very sad and terrible cases in the hospital. I think you are prepared for those sort of things. They're a shock to you when you first see them, but you must, if you are going to continue with your training, without being souless, or, you have got feeling for these people, but it's a different, it affects you in a different way. Just the same as if it was your own that you saw in this condition, it would no doubt affect you as a normal person, but I think that's part of your training, like medical, like doctors coping with terminal patients, and very sick patients.

So there is some emotional distancing between ....

Mm, you have to. Yes, you have to accept these things really.

Well, perhaps we can move on. Of course, it was fairly soon after that, that you yourselves were evacuated. There were these air raids on the aerodrome fairly close to you that were reasonably intense. Some of the nurses got away in the ship but I think you missed it for some reason.

Well, there was an air raid on the ship, on the wharves at Pireaus and the ship was, had one truckload of sisters had got through the gates onto the wharf and they got onto the ship but they closed the gates and wouldn't let any more because they wanted to get the ship outside from the wharf, out into the harbour and out eventually into the sea away when the air raids became ... and so we were just turned back again to the billets and we didn't get away till about, oh, it could have been several days after actually, I think it was about four or five if I remember rightly, but it's a while ago, I just, you know, I'm a bit vague.

Those precise dates and things don't matter too much. Well, the plan then, I think, was that you were to go by train, but again there was a further problem there.

That's right, the train lines were bombed and the trains couldn't go and they had to .... So they brought trucks again and we were taken right down by the Corinth Canal, over the Corinth Canal and down to Argos, a little, where the ships were waiting or coming in and waiting when the people were there to go on them.

(10.00)Well, I think that was a fairly arduous and generally wearing journey?

Oh, it was. We were all night and packed into a ten ton truck, I don't how many, but you couldn't even, you could hardly breathe in it, let alone move in it. And the spotters, there were spotters just sitting on the back of it, and the driver and a spotter in the front with him looking for bombing planes about. But it was a dreadful trip, really, all night and we arrived in the middle of the early morning and got to a graveyard near .... And then they bombed the convoy a bit on the road there, and we were sheltering in a graveyard all day and we had to wait till dark before they could go down to the boat. And it was, fortunately, a dark night with no moon which I suppose was, well, they couldn't wait for it because the Germans were only twenty-four hours behind us, almost at Athens at this stage.

Did you realise that yourself, how close ...?

No, in no way. And the more I read about it in things since and .... I thought, well, goodness me, they were only twenty-four hours behind us, getting away. But, um ....

> During this process of retreat and evacuation, was there a clear sense that the whole thing was under a kind of disciplined, command, that was organised in that sense, or was it a more helter-skelter, just keep going in the one direction, you know, and you'll probably get away feeling?

No, it was very well organised, I considered, because when it became dark and we were moved to a certain spot, and we had to walk. We were then told .... A lot of our luggage I think must have gone on the first ship because we got some of it when we got back to Gaza Ridge eventually. But what we had in our hands, we were marching down at almost like a bush track it seemed to us, it was pitch dark and every, I suppose, ten or twenty yards apart there were military, British military officers. 'You must throw away anything you cannot carry. There's only space for human people on these ships to get out. Please throw away everything you cannot carry yourself.' And it seemed to be miles we'd been walking but how far it was I really don't know, but it must have been at least a mile I would think.

> And they were literally officers every, I think you said twenty yards?

Yes, I would think that, they were very frequently stationed along this path, telling us to move on, to the .... And when we, we didn't know where we were going but we eventually got down to the water's edge and there was a destroyer pulled up at Argos, right at the flat wharf. And incidentally, I was over in Greece eighteen months ago with a tour of the National Trust and we went on a tour from Athens all over the Corinth, down the Corinth Canal and to this same wharf where we were evacuated from during the war.

> That must have been most interesting, Marjorie. Well, the journey on the destroyer, that must have been very much a, well, it must have been a rather secure feeling I'd imagine of safety and so on.

Very secure. With the navy, they seemed to have, where they got it from I wouldn't know, but they had bacon and eggs to give us as soon as we got on, lovely hot bacon and eggs. And we just spent the night under their big machine-gun at the .... There were several, I suppose, air raids or reconnaissance during the convoy across to ... in the convoy across to Crete but nothing. I think they did sink one ship, that's right, or hit one ship.

> That's most interesting.

Mm. I think I had that in the letter, didn't I?

> Yes. Yes, actually I think you did. Of course, the period on Crete, which was four or five days, once again was basically a brief staging period.

That's right.

> Fairly rough living. I think you were saying you were living in a hut up on a hillside.

Yes, on the cliff side. It was just an old hut, shed, full of bird lice, and a concrete floor, and we just bedded, we were just lying down on that. And eventually, about three o'clock in the morning we were woken up to go down to get on a boat at Suda Bay to go over to Alexandria.

> Just before that. Once again I think you had no idea that Crete was so close to being invaded by the German paratroopers.

No, we had no idea at all that the Germans were so, well, I think it was probably ten days or so after we left Crete that the German invasion ... because all the troops were there waiting for them.

(15.00) There was British and New Zealand and Australian troops on Crete waiting to attack the .... And my husband later on, to be, my husband later on, was on Crete with the 4th Battalion and he has said ever since the war that it was the most spectacular sight, although rather horrific: the 500 parachutes planes dropping German parachutists on Crete, he'd ever seen in his life. And this, of course, being shot down all the time. He actually treated quite a lot of them in his RAP.

> That's most interesting. One thing I was going to ask you, well two other things about Crete. Having been a country girl I'd imagine, well perhaps I'm wrong, there might have been some not, if not rough living, but you know, just putting up with bush life and being a bit more adaptable and used to, oh, the sort of basic things - going to the toilet out in the bush, that sort of thing, which no doubt you would have done as a child.

Yes, as a child, that's right.

> Do you think that made it easier for you than perhaps for some women who had more city backgrounds, coping with things like this evacuation?

Yes, it could have, because we lived in the days where there was no motor vehicles used on properties, we had sulkies and drays. And no septic tanks. And no electric light for a long, long time when I was very small. And it was, you know, five minutes hike down to the loo, more or less, in those days when septic tanks weren't so readily available. The water supplies in the country weren't like they are now onto town supplies, even some distance from towns. And no electricity until you got your own plant, but now they're all on local, town supplies. It perhaps could have made a bit of difference to me, yes.

> During the hardest periods of your life over the, for example, the evacuation, were there any women who did find it very difficult to cope?

No, I don't think so. I didn't notice it. I think everybody pulled their weight, played their part and were very, well, very courageous, I suppose, in these times, but didn't show any sign of wanting to give in at all.

> That's interesting. There is one other thing that I think should be mentioned about Crete, and this is, of course, involves your husband-to-be. You went back to Crete not so long ago and I think looked up some children that he'd befriended during the war.

Yes, that was right. I went to Crete for about a week on my way to London and to look up these four children who used to visit my husband's RAP which the battalion, or the brigade that he was attached to at the time were guarding the Iraklion aerodrome. And these children had been, lived in caves not far away, and of course they were cut off from the world, from any ... and food was very scarce. And he had often wondered if they'd perhaps been annihilated as lots of Cretan families were by the Huns. However, he said, 'I'd like you to try and find these children'. He didn't know their surnames but he knew their Christian names, Poppy who was about nine, [Kulah?] the next youngest, Spiro and Helene. Well, when I went, I went to the travel agent and he did other things I wanted. And he said, 'Come back after siesta and we'll see what we can do'. However, when I got back after the siesta, he and his wife who spoke good English were smiles all over, they'd found these family, who were now women of fifty, plus or minus.

And I think you did go on to meet them later that day?

That's right. I did go and meet them later that day and they were most hospitable, very hospitable. In fact wouldn't let me go home, plied me with so much Cretan food that I thought I would never be able to move. Then they, the son-in-law of the eldest girl Poppy who was a little one then, insisted on taking me back to the hotel. And he and his wife said, 'Will you be here tonight?'. I said, 'Yes'. I was about to ask them if they'd like to come up have a meal with me. 'We will pick you up at eight o'clock, and take you to a fish restaurant,' They took for a most beautiful drive right down the northern side of Crete to a lovely village called [Kasonsasu?]. We had a lovely evening, the daughter of one of Poppy's could speak a little English, her husband spoke no English and I spoke no Greek. So we had quite a hilarious, with lots of gesticulations, we had a very happy evening.

(20.00) That sounds lovely.

And they have a brother, the daughter had a brother, or Poppy's son, two sons live out in Australia, one at Punchbowl. And Paul had, my husband, then, had known about me finding them before even I'd got back to the hotel. They had rung them up.

It really is remarkable, isn't it?

Quite amazing really.

Perhaps just another related question to that.

Yes.

In the periods when you were in one place which you were coming to back at Gaza and Mount Scopus, was there really much chance for meeting local people, for getting to know them, or not?

In Jerusalem? Well, we used to go wander round Jerusalem, we'd go in and out of shops and that sort of thing, but I suppose we didn't really meet many of the local people, the local people in Jerusalem at all.

In a more personal, or deeper kind of way.

No.

Well, going back to your actual journey, Marjorie. You had about five days, I think, in Cairo on the way back.

Yes.

What's your recollection of that? Do you ...? It must have been a great relief, I imagine, to be off Crete and so on?

Oh, it was. Yes, it was a great relief to be back. We were out towards the camp, I think it was [Helmia?], a great big British staging camp, and not far from the Pyramids and Cairo. We went into Cairo a couple of times to have look. My impressions were that it was a very dirty, dusty place. But I gather it's improved a lot now. And while we were staying up in Jerusalem we were sent for a fortnight's leave, we were able to get, down to Cairo. Of course, it was mid-winter then, in the middle of January, it was different. And we saw quite a bit of Cairo then but, it was interesting, but still rather dirty and dusty.

Mm. Right. Well, let's go on to the main period then. It was after Cairo that you went directly back to Gaza where you again, I think, were seconded to the 1st AGH, and then later you went to Mount Scopus and then, of course, back again to Gaza when the 2/6th established themselves .... Sorry ....

The 2/1st came home, we established the 2/6th, that's what ....

Yes, that's right. What's your memory of the first Gaza period when you were with the 1st AGH yourself? What kind of work were you doing?

Oh, usual nursing, really. I was put in the isolation block with, on night duty. Just routine ward nursing. We didn't seem to have many wounded at that stage because the first Bardia and Tobruk campaign was over, and I suppose most of the wounded were either better and sent back to their units or boarded back to Sydney, to home, to Australia if they were not fit for military duty again.

Right. And the, well, the wards were obviously, I'd assume, similar to, if not the same wards that you'd been working in when you first arrived.

Yes, yes. That's right, they were all - some tent and some hut wards, they were. They were very good considering it was just all erected in a very, very short space of time, I would imagine.

Could you tell me, Marjorie, what an average day was like, if there was such a thing?

Oh, yes. We'd go on duty at the same hours as you would have in a civilian hospital back home. And you'd have your, um, so many hours on duty. You'd either have a morning pass, an afternoon pass, or an evening pass. And you'd work all the day, similar routine. And then you'd have your day off during the week. And sometimes you wouldn't go anywhere, sometimes two or three of you might have gone up to Jerusalem for the day, or to Tel Aviv for the day, or whatever, yes. And the messes, the officers' messes all along the staging

camps in Gaza used to have evenings and dinners and matron .... They'd send invitations to matron and she'd ... and 'bring back six, eight or ten sisters with you'. And she was, as usual, very fair and she'd give everyone an invitation in turn, make sure each girl got, went to a mess rou... not regularly, but all got their turn to go out.

They must have been very much looked forward to, I'd imagine.

Oh, they were. They were very much, and I think the officers, perhaps, particularly if they'd been in active service, were very pleased to see someone to talk to. And quite often it was someone they knew, or they had mutual acquaintances back home, or something like that, and it was quite good for their, for them, too, really.

(25.00) Yes, sure. Just going back to the question I asked a moment ago about daily routines. Actually in the wards, how much of your time was spent doing what you might call medical work? I suppose, working with medicines, temperatures, all those sorts of things. How much of it was more simply looking after people? Or was that more done by the VADs?

Oh, well. Of course the VADs didn't come over till later on. Yes, that sort of work was done by them but we used to do all that, too. You'd do that, too, because we didn't very ... oh, some, you'd have an orderly in each ward. They'd do some of that, too, but no, we used to do the sponging as well as the orderlies, and they were very good. Some of them had done the St John's Ambulance course before the war and some of them had had some sort of hospital experience, to a certain extent. But they were mostly very good boys and very helpful, the orderlies.

What about the patients themselves, did they help much themselves in terms of men who were less, men who were more recovered, helping men who were in poorer shape, and so on?

Oh, yes, very much so. They were wonderful in the wards, the up-patients as they were called. They'd, you know, do something to help another one who couldn't get about, or was badly wounded and recovering slowly, or perhaps not recovering much at all. They were very, very considerate to one another.

Mm. That's interesting. You've often, or occasionally mentioned doing medical work. Did you at any stage, do either surgical nursing or other nursing, such as dealing with men who were, you know, whose nerves had been blown?

Oh, yes. You had a mixture of all. We had surgical cases. I was never actually in the theatre, operating theatre, but I was in the, I suppose it's called now, the intensive care unit in modern hospitals, but we called it 'the shock hut' where they were taken immediately after operation, particularly major operation, and kept there for several days, and then transferred to the surgical ward. Yes, we had the usual routine of medical, surgical or whatever nursing, the same as you would in a hospital but, of course, the wounds in the surgical nursing was of much more traumatic than just, you might say, elective or urgent surgery that came in as does in civilian hospitals. They were different type of wounds, yes.

Yes, sure. Which did you prefer doing most?

I liked doing the surgical wounds because you saw, you know, the ones ... you saw them recovering, hopefully. And of course medical science, the war bought a lot out of, in new medical science, too. I mean, this often, to cure infection which no doubt most of the wounds had because they were some hours from being wounded out in the dirt and no cleanliness at all, and most of them were practically infected when they came. And the sulpha drugs all came in during the war and, at the very beginning, and then that was a great help to recovery of a lot of things.

> Yes. Men who must have been relatively hard to, I guess, to strike the right balance with, would have been men whose nerves had been badly affected by the war and so on. What's your recollection of dealing with those men?

Yes, that was really very, they were probably the worst cases, no doubt that's just human nature. Some people can stand these things much more than others. Some completely were blown to bits as far as their nerves were concerned and just couldn't cope with it. And they had to be treated, and a lot of them of course, were sent home. And you got the ones that naturally, in life, that you might term as not a very nice word but malingerers, but that's part of human nature.

> How common was that?

Not very common, not very common at all. But that, the people that were mentally affected, I think, was the most, one of the most traumatic because it was fairly permanent. It turned out with a lot of cases to be a permanent thing.

> Sure. Was there real sympathy for them from other men who were more able to cope, or not?

Oh yes, they felt very sorry for them because being a lay mind, they didn't understand the medical side of it either, I don't think really, naturally.

> You mean the other men?

Yes, I mean the other men, yes. But they were very sympathetic towards them.

> That's interesting. Let me just pop this other tape in.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Marjorie Tomlinson, 2/6th, Tape 2, Side 1.

> Let's go on to the period up at Mount Scopus. A lot of people have said that this was in some ways a very special period. Of course it was a properly built hospital, although not built as a hospital, but it ....

But it was good, sound accommodation.

That's right. And Jerusalem's atmosphere and so on. How do you recall the period?

Well, it was a very pleasant period up in Jerusalem, really. We were in this lovely palace that was built for the Kaiser I understand, after world war one, in which he didn't, I don't think, lived ... whether he did or not that's irrelevant. But it was, we looked right down over Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives and it was a very pleasant interlude really. And we were fortunate enough to be able to have seen a lot of Jerusalem and the environment, ... and all its environs. And yes, we were very, it was well run and I think everybody had quite a pleasant time up there as far as working in a hospital, a place rather, in rather different conveniences to what we had down in tents and huts.

In terms of living and messing, were you in tents or were you also in proper buildings?

Oh no, we were in proper big buildings. We were in the rooms in the old part of the, it was an enormous place. And they had accommodation for all of us, and I think the troops were in, well, probably the army had built huts for them to live in, in the grounds of the hospital. But they were all in the complex, yes.

That must have been quite a change, no longer living in a tent.

Well, it was for a while, yes, very comfortable really, yes. But the rooms were, well, made reasonably convenient, they weren't luxurious palace rooms but they were very comfortable.

And what about the facilities in the ward in this better building? Were they, in fact, in the sense of medical effectiveness, different in kind to the tented hospital? Or was it really just the same thing in a slightly more comfortable surroundings?

Well, we had basically the same equipment and things to do things with. It was in more comfortable surroundings and hygienically it was easier too, to manage, really.

To keep it clean and so on?

Yes.

It must have been particularly difficult in a tented situation, I mean, how, if you were walking on a dirt floor, for example, how did you stop men getting dirt into their beds and therefore into their wounds and so on?

Well, that was, of course, very difficult in a way. That's what I say, we had to .... Some of the tents had .... But even so they were just like concrete slabs which were, got pretty dusty and you couldn't help it, really. But somehow or other, it was amazing how we managed, really.

Mm. Sure. What are your other particular recollections of Mount Scopus, Marjorie?

Oh, I don't know that there was anything. Oh, we had tennis courts at Gaza Ridge, too, where they built a couple of tennis courts, and we had a couple of tennis courts up there which we could, in our time off, we could .... No, there was nothing in particular, it was just like, well, living in a city, ah, hospital in a city somewhere really, nothing like the size of Sydney, of course, the city of Jerusalem, I mean. It is bigger now I understand but .... No, I don't think ... we had a very pleasant interlude up there really. And being Jerusalem, of course, the centre of the Christian civilisation, it had a, meant something to you in a way.

(5.00) Yes, I'd imagine Christmas there would have been rather ....

[Inaudible] Christmas. We had a Christmas up there and it was in the winter, of course, there and it was the first time, I suppose, it might seem odd to say it, but I was homesick the whole way, the whole time I was away. And whether it was because it was Christmas in the centre of the beginning of the Christian world, I don't know, but it was quite a, it was rather wonderful to have been there, really, for Christmas.

Yes, I could imagine that. I think there was snow one year, wasn't there?

Oh yes, they had a terrific fall of snow. It was the first snowfall they've had for twenty-five years actually, it was really beautiful because it was such a magnificent setting for the snow, on fir trees and what have you, falling most gracefully. I also think about three years ago they had a very heavy fall of snow in Jerusalem, two or three years ago. I remember reading in the papers.

It must have been quite a special, I'd imagine, for men who'd been wounded, being in hospital over a period such as Christmas. What was done to make that a special time for them?

Oh yes, we managed to find Christmas decorations and a small present for them and they all had plum pudding and whatever, the Christmas festivities, and that sort of thing. It was amazing, we seemed to be able to rake up the necessary things for these occasions really, but ... we thought it was quite good.

Yes.

The Red Cross, of course, were wonderful in this regard in making these things available at these special times, too. The Red Cross were perfectly marvellous really. I couldn't say enough about them. And I think any men that have been prisoners of war in Germany, well in particular in Germany, I don't think Red Cross parcels ever got through in Japan to them, but I believe in Germany, I know of several people that I've seen since, said, no way would they have existed if it hadn't been for the Red Cross parcels.

That's most interesting. One of the other things I think that happened certainly about this time, if not exactly, was that you, although you'd known him from your days nursing in Sydney, you came into contact with the man who you became engaged to. Was it easy for people in that situation to get away? I mean, could you, could the pair of you get away easily for outings and things like that, or not?

Only, if he happened to be in the vicinity where, I think I saw him up at Jerusalem, he was up at Syria at the time and apparently they got a couple of days leave to come down to Jerusalem, and then when they were staging at Gaza between active times, we saw them. But no, you couldn't go off on a holiday or ... see, but you did contact one another occasionally, yes.

Oh, sorry, I had things wrong Marjorie, I thought by this stage he was working at the 2/6th Hospital.

No. He was, no, my husband, Paul Tomlinson, was never working with the 6th hospital. He was with the 4th Battalion for twenty-seven months, the RMO, and then he went to the 8th Field Ambulance as a major and then he eventually went to the 11th Field Ambulance as a CO of it.

Oh, I see, right. Perhaps, just leaving that aside then, yourself and your future engagement and so on. Was there much chance for men and women within the unit to socialise together, or did nurses tend to go off on their own and so on?

Oh no, they had their times when, if they knew one another or became friendly with them. Oh yes, there was quite, the occasional, you know, they'd go up to Jerusalem for the day or something like that and see them quite often. And there was a very nice club in Gaza .... Our mess was open, and if they were free they used to come down in the evenings and see, you know, their particular friends in the mess.

Right. Well, let's go on now to the period when you do go back to Gaza, and this, of course, was when the 2/6th established a hospital there, taking over from the 1st AGH. In that transition period, do you remember that as being a very straightforward and kind of clean transition? You walk in, they walk out, or was it, was there much to sort out?

Oh no, it was very well organised. We just came in, the patients of course were still there in the hospitals and we just took over and continued as though we'd been there all the time. Oh no, the 1st Hospital went out and left everything in a very ... it was no doubt, very orderly. I mean the patients were still there. They had to be looked after, just the same.

(10.00) And it was during this period that, I think, that it really became a very large hospital of, I think you were saying, 2,000 patients.

Yes, I think there were about 2,000 patients in the hospital because it was the El Alamein, the last desert campaign, and all the wounded came down from the desert to Gaza, to us or perhaps some of them went, they went, like, no doubt, to British hospitals in Egypt, I suppose. But we had a lot, mostly Australians ones we had brought down, anyway.

Of course, before this had been the Syrian campaign ....

Yes.

And then El Alamein.

Yes.

How much did that affect the, your daily routines, the daily life of the hospital?

Well, we were very busy. We might have worked a bit longer hours for a few, couple of weeks, but that was ... we were there to do ... expected to. We didn't, it didn't worry us, really. We just went on doing. We were rather glad to be in permanent, constant employment, so to speak.

Yes, sure. Well, certainly compared with the time in Greece.

Yes. Yes. Mm. No, we certainly worked just the same, as though we were in a busy, very busy hospital where you would work overtime in civilian life if it were necessary.

Sure. Do you remember anything about the way in which men were admitted to the hospital? When they came down from first of all casualty clearing stations and then so on down the line, how coordinated were things, for example, when wounded men arrived, was it immediately known which wards they'd go to and so on? Or was there quite a process of sorting them out at the hospital?

Oh no, that was organised because as they would arrive at the hospital, they'd go through an admission centre, presumably, and if they were very sick, medically very sick they'd be sent to a medical ward. It might have been pneumonia or whatever it might have been. It might have been a dysentery type of infection that they needed immediate, very concentrated treatment for. If they were wounded they were sent to, depending sort of a wound. If it was a fracture of a leg, they'd be sent to the orthopaedic ward, or if it was an abdominal wound they'd be sent to the officers' or the surgical ward of the troops, whatever. If it was a medical complaint, the officers had a medical ward, or the troops. And if it was really very severe they'd be put in the shock hut, particularly. And then the theatre was open twenty-four hours a day, ready to go. And they were taken up as, in priority, as it was most urgent, to the theatre. And then sent back to whatever surgical ward it was. It may have been a chest wound, they would have been sent to where they were doing most of those cases.

So I'd assume that at the worst periods when men were being admitted off, from convoys ....

Yes, convoys came.

Operating theatres would have been, um ....

Ready to go, that's right.

And just going steadily through the people.

That's right. This organisation, I would say, would be given, Colonel Money would be given absolute credit for the organisation of it at his hospital.

You were saying before that he, and I have heard other people say that he was not only a good doctor, a very good doctor but also a real administrator.

Oh, he was. He was unique, he was quite outstanding as an administrator, no doubt about that.

Are there any particular examples that come to mind?

Not really, just the overall smooth running of the hospital really, you know. And he was very fair and ... to all ranks, I consider. That's my personal opinion. And he was, you couldn't fault him as an administrator.

You were saying that on the ward rounds that he had a very strong memory, I think.

He and Matron had an outstanding memory. You would have, say, fifty in a big tent ward, fifty troops, they would be Gunner so-and-so, Trooper so-and-so, Private so-and-so, Corporal whatever their names were, and you'd introduce them to Matron, after the first day they'd come down from the convoy from Alamein. She'd come round the next morning to do her rounds, 'This is so-and-so, Matron', giving them their proper rank and name. And she'd come round the next day and she'd say, 'Good morning, Corporal so-and-so, Good morning Gunner so-and-so, how are you?'. We couldn't remember, we could barely remember their surname, let alone their title, having to see to their treatment, she'd know all about them. And that was in a 2,000 bed hospital.

(15.00) That's remarkable. And I'd imagine that sort of personalising of it would help people a lot in terms of ....

Yes. And Colonel Money was the same. The minute he entered the door to do rounds in the ward, he'd not only look at the patients and see, you know, if they were well kept or what they were up to, but he would look for anything that was wrong in the ward, or any untidiness, too. He'd walk in with his staff sergeant and his .... He generally had a small entourage as was the custom of the colonel of the unit. He'd walk to the door and the staff sergeant would give the order, 'Attention', and all up-patients would stand erect at their beds and the ones that were sick and in bed able to, they'd certainly be at more or less attention in their bed and observe the Colonel's entrance, really. I mean everything was done to military precision, more or less, but still consideration for the patients was his greatest priority.

That's most interesting. It's a very clear picture of the men sitting bolt upright in bed.

Yes, they wouldn't sit bolt upright but they'd certainly observe as much as they could. And their beds all had to be reasonably tidy and .... He'd notice everything right or wrong.

Is there anything else that stands out particularly clearly in your mind about this period at Gaza, Marjorie?

Oh, not really. We had a very la... you're talking of social life. Once we .... It was after the Alamein business was over and not long before we came home from the Middle East, the last Australian troops. It was New Year's Eve and the sisters' mess had a very nice party, I can remember. And there were a lot of British and Scotch units stationed along, and a lot of them came down to the party. Oh, we had a very big mess, we cleared the dining room part where

we used to ... and we had quite a lovely, almost dance and the Scotch people taught us all their Scottish reels and their [inaudible] and whatever. It was quite fun. And then we had a band from one of the units which were always excellent. But that was like a, sort of, almost farewell party and the boys that had come back and were a lot better from Alamein were very happy. And the thought, I think, then was of coming back to Australia which made it very much more pleasant, of course.

> That's a lovely picture of that special night. Well, moving on to that. When news did come through that you were to come back to Australia, I know we have to keep and eye on the time by the way, too, I'm aware of that, was that news greeted well?

Oh yes. Oh yes. Very well, it was really unbelievable, although we realised that the war in the Pacific was reaching a rather critical stage at this moment and .... There was great rejoicing at coming home but a certain amount to know that, well, nothing's finished yet.

> Mm. Sure. That you were coming out here to more of the same. Of course, you had become engaged, I think it was September '42, that must have coloured things somewhat. Was your husband coming back?

He came, he was in the ... yes, he did .... He went over into the Middle East with the first convoy that went over on the [*Strathnaver*?] and he came back on the last convoy that came back from the Middle East.

> Right. Well, the journey back for you, I think, was on the *Acquitania*.

Yes.

> Was that really very different to the *Queen Mary* voyage, or not?

Oh no, it was fairly comfortable as a trip. I must add, and she will probably tell you, that Sister Crittenden, Moira Atkins now, was so desperately seasick she nearly died on the way home. It was a very rough trip even though it was on the big ship and they couldn't get her to Brisbane, to Fremantle quickly enough, and there was an ambulance waiting to take her to the hospital. She had to be taken off the ship. She was sick from the day we got on, she was a terrible sailor, she'll tell you that.

> It certainly sounds like that, doesn't it?

But um, she was, all jokes aside. The medical men that were looking after her said they just didn't think they'd get her to Western Australia alive.

> So she was a bed case.

Oh yes. And she was very, very ill ....

> I suppose [inaudible].

It was a nice trip go.... You asked about, was it a good trip. Yes, it was in a way, but when you're in a room with a girl that's very ill, not that she could help it. I mean, you were worried all the time.

Is that, the medical problem there, is that you become very dehyrdrated?

Oh, she was dehyrdrated, yes, she did. Yes, she became dehyrdrated, she became everything. She was desperately ill.

I suppose you'd have nutritional problems too, if you can't keep any food down.

Oh yes, mm.

(20.00) Anyway, leaving that aside. When you got back to Australia, of course your personal future was quite different, having become engaged. Was Australia different?

Oh no, I didn't find it so. I think people were well and truly, after over two years of being away from it, were very accustomed to life during wartime. And I think the Australian people were marvellous really. I would say, no, they were not different because things were rationed, you expected that, they were beginning before we left, or they had begun, I think, before we left and, not that that worries people to have to go without for a cause occasionally.

I'm sure that's true.

It does them good, I think, really.

What about the presence of American servicemen?

Oh yes, they were everywhere in the country, and I think very welcome, the American servicemen. They were out here, sent out to the Pacific Ocean to do a job, the same as we were sent to the Middle East to do a job. And I think, I mean, they must have helped considerably. I know a lot of people think they'd have been better out of the war but that's just ignorance in my book.

Yes, well, there was certainly no doubt about that, I think. You, yourself, married fairly soon after coming back and having married couldn't leave New South Wales, that was the regulations. Looking back on it all, or looking back on your active service overseas, how did it all seem to you?

Oh well, a wonderful experience in your life. I think I don't regret it now, in one way. I made a lot of friends that I still have which I think it creates a terrific fellowship in .... I mean you're working and you're looking after a very large cross-section of people, community, and your all in there for the same reason and .... No, I think it was something that must add to your, well, character if you like to put it that way, in the long term really. And it is something, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. It wasn't all fun and games, I can tell you, but it was something, I think, if people in this day and age would realise that you get a lot of pleasure out of doing things for other people as well as the people get pleasure out of having it done for them. Well, in a bigger way, if you do something for your country. I don't feel the country owes, life owes anything to me. I think we owe a lot to life.

Mm. I'm sure that's true.

Really. And that's my opinion of it, but still, I'm only one in what, seventeen or eighteen million people now.

Yes, I guess by implication your suggesting that those values may not be so prevalent today.

Right, that's right, but .... No, my impressions were .... When I came back and went to the 3rd Women's Hospital we looked after only girls from the armies, the WRANS and the AATS and the different women's services .... And they were all very nice, they were only young girls really, young, late teenagers most of them, and I went .... The matron of the hospital was also a Sister Cox who was, had been with the 1st AGH and she got married soon after she came home and she couldn't go. She was put in charge of the 3rd Women's Hospital at Concord and I was at Prince Alfred with her too, so it was a very nice finale to spend time there with her. And yet, although you couldn't go away you were still doing something that helped the cause, really.

Yes, well, I'm sure that's certainly true. Well, just one final question that I put to everybody, Marjorie. Is there anything that you feel you would like to add to this record that hasn't been said, that you would like to say, or not?

Well, do you want me to say it then? I'll give it to you.

This is just continuing on.

The only thing I'd like to say is that I hope that the spirit of ANZAC carried on from the first world war, even though there was no ANZAC in the second world war, but the whole sentiment and feeling was surely the same. I was asked a few years ago by a friend who teaches at Canterbury Girls' High School who is very interested in this, if I would give the girls a talk on the spirit, what the ANZAC means. And I said yes, I'd be prepared. Well, the girls were very interested, they were, the majority of them were migrant children, Greek, Lebanese, Italian, Asian, and of all sorts who'd come from, particularly the Asians who'd come from disrupted countries and never known anything else all their lives. I tried to get across to them what, I said to them, there will always be wars of some sort in the world, we don't want them but .... I think they were very interested, I tried to get across to them what I felt was the spirit of ANZAC. And then they all were very interested and came and had a talk to me afterwards. And their first impression was, 'You must have been frightened and scared all the time. It must have been ....' They were only young girls aged thirteen to sixteen, I suppose. And no doubt, particularly the Asians had come from nothing but war-torn countries, and lived under dreadful conditions. But I enjoyed talking to them. And the headmistress was quite pleased to think that they may have learnt a bit from what the spirit of ANZAC was. And so I hope it does something.

That's interesting. Well, obviously it's bridging between generations. Well, look on behalf of the War Memorial, Marjorie, thank you very, very much.

It's a pleasure.

For that.

END OF INTERVIEW